

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release December 5, 1971

Walker 343-5634

## INTERIOR URGES CONGRESS TO ESTABLISH SAN FRANCISCO BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Department of the Interior has asked Congress to enact a law to set aside a San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, it was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton.

Action is necessary both for the sake of man and an irreplaceable part of his environment, Secretary Morton asserted.

"Seldom has this department had occasion to recommend legislation so urgently required for the preservation of wildlife habitat, for the provision of associated recreational opportunities, and for the maintenance of a natural environment in close proximity to a burgeoning metropolitan population as this, our proposal for the establishment of a national wildlife refuge in south San Francisco Bay," Nathaniel P. Reed, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, stated in a letter to Congress forwarding Interior's proposal.

In 1850, prior to diking and filling, the area of San Francisco Bay was nearly 700 square miles, but today the bay contains only 435 square miles. Unless there is action to prevent further encroachment, much of the south bay's remaining wetlands will be filled in within the next 10 years, and probably all of it by the year 2000, Reed's letter said.

The Interior official pointed out that this destruction of habitat is in an area that supports a rich diversity of fish and wildlife, including species threatened with extinction. Its marsh, mudflats, open water and salt ponds provide habitat to migratory waterfowl, shore and water birds, fish and aquatic animals, including a colony of harbor seals. Nearly 70 percent of the Pacific Flyway's shore birds at some time of the year depend upon the south bay tidal flats for food and related life requirements. The California least tern, California clapper rail, and salt marsh harvest mouse are endangered species that inhabit the area.

A year-long study conducted by the Interior Department's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and its Fish and Wildlife Service "fully supports the establishment of a 21,662-acre San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge," Reed said.

Recent actions by State, county, and municipal governments indicate willingness to assist in the establishment of such a refuge. Much of the needed lands would require purchase, but some State and municipally owned lands would be donated.

Developments at the refuge, if it is approved, would include an interpretive and educational center, wildlife observatories, wildlife trails, fishing piers, and common carrier access. Developments would not be allowed to disturb the wildlife.

"A national wildlife refuge in south San Francisco Bay would afford a unique opportunity to provide protection for the environment and its wildlife now threatened with destruction and assure the provision of wildlife-oriented recreation, education, and interpretation at the doorstep of 4.2 million persons in the San Francisco area," Reed said.

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